

CHOOSING THE RIGHT MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER



Forming a good therapeutic alliance with your treatment team is one of the keys to a positive outcome with mental health care. Choosing the right provider(s) can be like finding the right romantic relationship or friendship. Many mental health providers offer a free consultation so you can see if it feels like a good fit. If it is not offered to you, feel free to ask for it.

Not every provider is going to be a good fit, and that's okay. You can always switch to a new provider who you better connect with, no matter how long you have been working with a provider.

There are many types of mental health providers. Here are the most common types:

PROVIDING ASSESSMENT, THERAPY, AND TREATMENT PLANNING

- **Psychologists:** most often master's or doctoral-level providers (PhD or PsyD), trained to evaluate a person's mental health using clinical interviews and diagnosing conditions through psychological evaluations and testing. Many provide specific kinds of therapy services and are allowed to prescribe medications in five states.
- **Other Licensed Counselors:** typically, master's level clinicians trained to evaluate a person's mental health and provide therapy based on their training. This includes Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs), Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC), and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs).
- **Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors (LADCs):** trained to treat people with substance use disorders; education requirements vary by state.
- **Social Workers & Licensed Clinical Social Workers:** provide therapy, treatment planning, case management, inpatient discharge planning, and services to support healthy living.
- **Pastoral Counselors:** clergy members with training in clinical pastoral education and trained to diagnose conditions and provide counseling.
- **Certified Peer Specialists:** peer specialists with lived experience - trained, certified and prepared to assist with support, mentoring and guidance to help a person set goals, develop strengths and achieve recovery.



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PROVIDING TREATMENT MOST OFTEN BY PRESCRIBING AND MONITORING MEDICATION

- **Psychiatrists:** medical doctors trained to diagnose and treat mental health conditions, most often including with medication.
- **Primary Care Providers:** medical doctors and advanced practice nurses; may offer and can prescribe medication, most often addressing mild to moderate mental health conditions.
- **Psychiatric Pharmacists:** advanced-practice pharmacists who specialize in mental health care and may prescribe or recommend medications if allowed in their state and practice setting.
- **Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners:** provide assessment, diagnosis and therapy for mental health conditions and/or substance use disorders.
- **Physician Assistants:** Performs pharmacologic treatment strategies, orders medications, monitors, and evaluates progress on psychiatric and other medications.



Resources from NAMI can help guide you on how to choose a [Mental Health Professional](#) and [finding care that fits your cultural background](#). It may also be helpful to research [types of treatments](#) to learn more about therapy sessions.

Scan the QR code for more resources

NAMI. [Types of Mental Health Professionals.](#)
NAMI. [Finding a Mental Health Professional.](#)
NAMI. [Finding Mental Health Care that Fits Your Cultural Background.](#)
American Psychological Association. [How to choose a psychologist.](#)
[Check the NAMI HelpLine FAQ page for more information.](#)



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